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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 PRAGUE 000174

SIPDIS

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SUBJECT: CZECH PLANS TO REMAIN THE GADFLY IN THE EU'S CUBA POLICY

Classified By: Political Officer, Kimberly C. Krhounek for reasons 1.4(b) and (d).

11. (C) Summary. While the Czechs eventually agreed with the EU's proposal to lift the restrictive measures against Cuba at last week's GAERC meeting, they are continuing to fight for EU approval of a detailed plan for structured dialogue with dissidents and hope to establish criteria to use as a benchmark when the policy comes up for review in six months. Petr Mikyska, who handles EU-Cuban issues at the MFA, provided a complete readout of the steps leading to the EU decision, discussed points which the Czechs want to be factored into the "review" of the new policy in six months, and requested further information sharing between our Interest Section and the Czech Embassy in Cuba (as their small embassy occasionally reports significant developments to the MFA too late to be effective). As a reward for their efforts, the Czechs fully expect the Cuban government to attempt to "re-freeze" relations with their embassy, but believe that on this point at least, the EU will stand firm. End summary.

THE COCKTAIL WARS

12. (C) According to Mikyska, the Czech MFA determined as early as last September that there was no EU support for maintaining the June measures, so it devoted its efforts to achieving textual changes, such as strengthening the section on interaction with the dissidents and eliminating any reference to whom the EU countries could invite to their national days. Mikyska conceded that while the issue of invitations for national day receptions was "collateral" to the real debate, he stressed that there is a historical precedent in the Czech Republic of western embassies inviting dissidents to their receptions during the Communist era. While there was no mention of EU invitations to dissidents in the final GAERC Council conclusion, Mikyska admitted that, despite FM Svoboda's claims to the contrary, the restriction on invitations to the diplomatic corps and EU nationals is indeed part of the EU negotiated policy. Luckily for the Czechs, it is technically only in effect for the six months of this new policy, so may not affect the CR's national day, which falls in October.

THE DEVIL IS IN THE DETAILS OF THE STRUCTURED DIALOGUE

13. (C) The Czechs believe that the GAERC conclusion's requirement for more intense dialogue with dissidents needs a specific plan of action, beyond the specified requirement that high-level visitors must raise human rights and the position of dissidents with GOC officials. While the Czechs believe that there is an "implicit" requirement for EU embassies in Havana to conduct regular outreach to satisfy the requirement for the EU's "regular and enhanced" meetings with dissidents, they want a list of specific actions to guide all EU embassies. To ensure that all member states also engage with peaceful opposition members, the Czechs have proposed a detailed scheme that is now under discussion within the EU working groups (it was to be discussed today, but that meeting has now been postponed until next week). The Czech scheme focuses on two levels of meetings: those with Heads of Mission, and those at working level with embassy representatives who are part of the EU's Working Group on Human Rights. The Czechs propose that Heads of Mission meet a minimum of four times a year with rotating groups of dissidents who represent different opposition groups. Working level meetings would take place monthly, to ensure a minimum of 16 meetings a year. Mikyska said that most elements of the Czech proposal have the tacit support of the Netherlands, Germany, Poland and Finland, but the frequency of the required meetings remains in dispute. The Dutch and Spanish prefer to have discussion with dissidents only at the Troika.

LET THE CUBANS BE THE BAD GUYS

14. (C) Mikyska said that the Cuban government was already doing itself a disservice by claiming that the conditions

attached to lifting the restrictive measures were "unacceptable." With a laugh he said that if the Czechs couldn't stop the Spanish at the EU working level, they would sit back and give the Cuban government itself a chance to do so. The Czechs believe there is a strong likelihood that the Cuban government will again try to "re-freeze" relations with them, and other troublesome embassies like Poland and the delegation of the European Commission. The EC is already in a dispute with the GOC over Cuban attempts to wrest control over the management of EU funds, a non-starter for the EC which is concerned about the rampant corruption in Cuba. Mikyska said any attempt to refreeze relations with a select few would be met by the same demonstration of unity that occurred in December when Cuba attempted only a partial restoration of relations with EU countries. On that issue at least, he affirmed that the EU remains "pretty strong" and has reaffirmed this position both internally and with the Cuban government.

THE REVIEW PROCESS

15. (C) While Mikyska said no formal criteria had been worked out for the review of the EU's Cuba policy which is to take place in six months, the Czechs are developing their own criteria that they will be monitoring and plan to use in the review negotiations. These criteria include:

- a) The release of dissidents;
- b) The treatment of embassies and status of diplomatic relations across the EU;
- c) Steps towards political and economic transformation;
- d) The Cuban government's attitude towards the UNHCR and Special Rapporteur; and
- e) The total lack of any movement on issues of importance to the EU.

The Czechs firmly expect to see "a lack of progress" in the next six months, although Mikyska conceded that the GOC would likely release a few token dissidents in June, to curry favor prior to the formal review. That said, even without tangible progress, the Czechs believe that it will be "very hard" to re-impose restrictive measures, especially as Spain is likely to argue that there will not have been sufficient time for the measures to take effect. Throughout the EU deliberations, Mikyska claimed that the Spanish were in close contact with the Cubans, leaking information to the press about a consensus decision before it had been reached and remaining "difficult" today.

CZECHS REMAIN OUTSPOKEN

16. (C) The MFA has strong support within the Czech Republic for its firm stance. Former President Vaclav Havel, himself a former dissident and internationally recognized human rights figure, published a strongly worded opinion in papers throughout Europe condemning the EU's "betrayal" of Cuba's dissidents. Citing the importance that simple acts such as access to foreign officials have to dissidents, he called for the EU to end its reliance on the worst political tradition of "appeasement of evil" in allowing the Cuban government to dictate to the diplomatic community who they may invite to official receptions. Mikyska also noted that within the Czech MFA, the new EU policy is known as the new "appeasement policy." Member of European Parliament Jana Hybaskova agreed, but blamed the individual member states (including the Czechs) for allowing such a policy to go forward. "It is easy to blame the EU," she said, "But who is the EU? The individual member states, that is who."

COMMENT AND APPEAL FOR HELP

17. (C) Mikyska concluded with an appeal for assistance from USINT Havana to help keep the Czech embassy there informed of events on the ground. With only one Czech employee in addition to the HOM, their small embassy frequently struggles to stay up to speed on fast-breaking developments. This was critical to MFA efforts in one instance last December when the Czech Charge d'Affairs informed the MFA of the arrest of an additional 21 dissidents last year, but it was too late for the Czechs to use it in the EU negotiations. In addition, the Czechs have few contacts with Cubans in the provinces, and would appreciate being included in any meetings with people who operate outside of Havana.
CABANISS